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This edited volume (HBIIN) of fourteen essays highlights the revived interest in ritual studies. Enriched by both textual and ethnographic materials, these wide-ranging essays explore the role of initiation in constructing social identity at both the individual and collective levels, thus bringing to light multiple aspects of rituals. Of particular interest is the definition and overlap of borders that the rituals are directed towards creating. HBIIN not only points out the breach of boundaries among different religious and ethnic groups, it also draws attention to the overlap that exists between different life cycle rituals. In the case of the *ihī* and *aśvattha*¹ initiations, for instance, we can also see a human engagement with non-human agents in the ritual act. Striking examples can be found in the rituals of Buddhist initiation where the structure of one ritual (e.g. consecration of images) is overlaid onto another (e.g. initiation of human agents), or when rituals are taken over from one tradition (Śaivite) and reassigned to another (Buddhist). HBIIN vividly portrays how rituals are transferred and abandoned with the shift in religious tradition, and points out the infusion of new meaning when older forms are maintained in new religious realities. The work also addresses the hybrid nature of rituals that involves

¹ Sanskrit terms cited here are not end-hyphenated, but nevertheless retain any eventual end-*a*, even when the reference is or may be to a modern language.

hybrid language, and, rather than reducing these rituals to their origins, it acknowledges their distinct conjoined identity (exemplified in the case of the studies of Newar ritual manuals). Broadly speaking, the processes of building, defining, and maintaining religious identity through ritual have remained at the center of this work. Rather than characterising rituals as exclusive, HBIIN highlights their inclusive aspects along with those that nullify the effect of previous rituals. This wide array of research contextualises various aspects of rituals and assists in broadening our understanding of the multiple roles rituals play in constructing social reality.

Every chapter in this book brings to light hitherto unknown domains of rituals, particularly highlighting the flux of ritual formation, inter-tradition exchange in ritual structures, and invention and innovation in establishing new rituals and meaning that correspond to shifting cultural paradigms. In the very first contribution, by Christof Zotter, we can see the ritual shift where he examines the evolution of the *vratabandha* ritual of the Bahun and Chetri. Zotter convincingly demonstrates that *saṃskāras* from earlier times have transformed into *homa* or *pūjā* forms, and the overall structures have been customised to the shifting cultural context. Anne Keßler-Persaud forwards the same argument in her paper dealing with *upanayana* and *samāvartana*, where complex rituals have been compressed into relatively austere ritual procedures. She argues that different *saṃskāras*, responding to a changing social environment, have been integrated in later periods into the performance a single ritual. Accordingly, both these essays highlight the economy of space and time in the shifting ritual paradigm.

Shingo Einoo traces the instances of the application of eye-salve (*āñjana*) in different rituals, ranging from the Vedic soma ritual to contemporary *samāvartana* rites. The

Vedic myth relates eye-salve to the eyeball of Vṛtra, a malignant entity killed by Indra, and so the Vedic rituals invoke Vṛtra while applying the eye-salve. While the application of mascara by mothers for ‘protecting’ their children from evil is widely popular in India, this ritual use of eye-salve can be interpreted as enhancing vision, or simply a protection rite. Einoo’s essay provides abundant references for anyone interested in examining the context and concepts related to applying eye-salve in rituals from classical texts to contemporary studies.

Kathleen Gögge, in her study of early childhood rituals among Newars and Parbatiyas in the Kathmandu valley, compares and contrasts the concept of impurity related to childbirth found in these two communities. This detailed study relating to rituals associated to childbirth among Rajopadhyayas and other Newar families as well as Parbatiya Hindus demonstrates noteworthy differences among sub-communities that share the same overarching beliefs regarding the afterlife and impurities. Gögge keenly analyses variations found in these two communities in rituals involving worshipping the same deity, Śaṣṭhi. She examines the naming ceremony among Newars and Parbatiyas, highlighting subtle differences and variations in the sense of the ritual economy. Social strata and local beliefs associated with the shrines of local deities appear to be among the constituents of this divergence.

Axel Michaels explores the application of hybrid language in Newar variants of Hindu initiation rituals, a phenomenon viewed negatively by early Indologists. As he highlights, Newar ritual manuals defy Sanskrit grammar rules, but nonetheless maintain ritual accuracy. Noteworthy in this observation is the departure from the Vedic ritualist’s emphasis on linguistic purity to maintain ritual accuracy, thereby affecting its efficacy in

the changed cultural dynamics. This linguistic variant, in Michael's observation, constitutes a significant part of the Newarisation of Hindu rituals. This can be seen as a triumph of the social milieu over rigid grammatical rules, as the fixed grammatical rules cannot map the fluidity of social transaction of a language. Michaels thus argues in favour of a Newar Sanskrit language, giving it an independent status.

Niels Gutschow, in his study of the Newar *ihī* marriage ritual, focuses on the spatial connotation of the initiation ritual of pre-adolescent girls, with their peculiar ritual marriage with the wood apple (*bel* or *bilva*). By observing a spatial connotation that aligns the eight mother goddesses (Mātṛkās) to actual geography, Gutschow relates this ritual to initiation rituals, observing similarities in granting ritual authority. In other words, just as an initiation ritual gives males the authority to conduct rituals, so does *ihī* to females. Gutschow details *ihī* in this essay by outlining ritual acts performed on different days of its enactment. Due to its public nature, he observes, the *ihī* ritual blurs caste distinctions or any other social hierarchy. Through it, he adds, a girl not only becomes marriageable but also a member of her father's lineage group. By outlining its peculiarities, Gutschow comes to the conclusion that this ritual can be regarded as more of an initiation than a marriage ritual.

In his essay, David N. Gellner observes that among the Newars initiation can be viewed as a site of cultural conflict. His conclusion rests on the fact that initiation among Newars is linked with social status. This status was maintained by the individual performing the ritual, and the place or ritual pretext wherein such an initiation ritual occurred. The Newars outside the Kathmandu valley faced the dilemma of travelling to Kathmandu and hiring Newar priests, or conducting rituals with the Parbatiyas who were locally a-

available, and this seems to have constructed a class distinction. While addressing ritual fluidity in the light of social conflict, Gellner introduces into the discourse the Theravada Buddhism introduced into the Kathmandu valley, that views traditional Newar rituals as highly Hinduised. He also observes that this conflict is less pronounced in the case of initiating girls. Gellner concludes that these rituals are essentially a part of expressing social identity, and highlights that this means of creating identity has nonetheless different purposes amongst males and females, as the social construction of gender plays a noteworthy role in identifying ritual structure.

Todd T. Lewis, writing on the ritual (re)construction of personal identity, explores Newar Buddhist life-cycle rites among the Uray of Kathmandu. He opens his argument by remarking that in spite of the Theravada rejection of rituals, it is the rituals that have constructed and maintained Buddhist identity in the Kathmandu valley or anywhere else where Buddhism has flourished. In his analysis, Lewis clearly outlines the ways in which Mahayana Buddhism was understood by Newar Buddhists in the Kathmandu valley in terms of rituals. This study highlights the appropriation of Brahmanical rites into the Buddhist context by the Vajrācārya Buddhist priests. Lewis observes that life-cycle rituals, in the Buddhist context, play the role of initiation, acting out the life of the Buddha. With this understanding, he identifies the ritual vows (*vrata*) associated with Buddhist Vajrayāna deities. He also describes the limited access to tantric mantras and initiation. The essay concludes with remarks on modernity and Buddhist ritual initiation, highlighting new trends, such as that of integrating Śākya and Vajrācārya traditions in modern ritual paradigms.

Alexander von Rospatt explores the consecration ceremony in the ritual text

Kriyāsaṅgrahapañjikā (KSP), and its development in Newar Buddhism. His study combines both insights gleaned from this 11th–12th century text, and ethnographic materials. He primarily focuses on KSP's treatment of the consecration ceremony, with the employment of ten saṃskāras, that was developed in later Newar Buddhism. By tracing the history of the text and its influence in Newar ritual order, Rospatt establishes the importance of the consecration ritual among the Newar Buddhist community, and its evolution. In order to advance his arguments, he first gives an overview of the consecration ceremony and then explores the textual sources for conducting this ritual. Against this backdrop, he highlights the role of prenatal saṃskāras in the consecration ceremony that primarily involves the production of the image for ritual worship. Noteworthy is that the images of Vajrayāna deities undergo the same rites as an infant does, receiving ten forms of rituals, as outlined in KSP. Rospatt sustains his study with ample ethnographic examples, primarily in the context of analysing the *adhivāsanamaṇḍala* and bathing vessels, highlighting the formation of the *vajradhātumaṇḍala* to accomplish the ritual. The rite of *pratiṣṭhā*, as he outlines, involves not only the sequential rites identified as saṃskāras, but also a ninefold tantric initiation, involving the generation of the *maṇḍala* and various forms of consecration. Rospatt then asks whence the employment of the saṃskāras for consecrating images originates. He notices that this performance of life-cycle rites, highly suggestive of Brahmanical rituals, is also indirectly operative in the Kālacakra tradition, and thus correlates various initiation rites with life-cycle rituals. But he distinguishes this finding from Tanemura's position, which he cites, that saṃskāras were incorporated into the consecration ceremony in the Nepalese tradition. Following Rospatt, there are numerous variations that distinguish the consecration ritual from saṃskāra rites. There is, how-

ever, no denying that the life-cycle rituals have been inspired by Hindu practice. Rospatt endeavours to deal with this in the rest of his paper.

Harunaga Isaacson studies the development of the initiation ritual in the higher Buddhist tantric systems. Beginning with the citation of a ritual of “the consecration of the knowledge of wisdom” (*prajñājñānābhiṣeka*) that involves sexual rites, he makes some observations supplementing Sanderson’s earlier arguments regarding this ritual. Isaacson offers a correlation between five different consecrations and five different states of wisdom or awakenings outlined in the Vajrayāna texts. He explores the reasons beneath the sexually explicit content of the rituals such as the consecration of the knowledge of wisdom, analysing classical texts such as the *Abhiṣekanirukti* or *Guhyasamāja*. Against this backdrop, Isaacson observes that some of the Vajrayāna texts omit this sexually explicit rite, the consecration of the knowledge of wisdom, counted as the fourth consecration. This creates internal diversity.

Jörg Gengnagel explores the removal of the sectarian mark (*liṅgoddhāra*) in Siddhānta Śaivism by primarily based on Somaśambhu’s eleventh century manual. The study focuses on an interesting aspect of ritual that liberates subjects from their vows, allowing them to get married, or, more specifically as detailed in this paper, the removal of non-Śaivite vows so that the subjects can fully participate in the Śaivite ritual order. Gengnagel points out that the correlation made between the Śaiva principles (*tattva*) and different religious orders have this aspect of ritual transformation, where a new convert has to initiate his journey upwards from the bottom of the pyramid, from the principle of earth (*pr̥thivī*). Among the religious groups mentioned here — Buddhists, Jains, Vaiṣṇavas, Pāśupatas, and Mahāvratins — four are outside the broader Śaiva system, and

Pāśupatas and Mahāvratis are distinct from the Siddhantins as far as the rituals are concerned. Citing Rambo's monograph on religious conversion, Gengnagel outlines that many of the criteria of this are met in the removal of the sectarian mark. This observation expands the presumed application of conversion, as in the case of conversion to Islam, and the author expects the same type of fluidity in the case of the accounts of conversion from Christianity to Hinduism.

Ute Hüsken, basing her argument on her fieldwork in Tamil Nadu, brings to light the issue of authority of priesthood in Vaiṣṇava temples. With the Tamil Nadu government declaring the right of all castes to perform priestly rites, the traditional norm of Brahmins maintaining the priesthood has been challenged, and Hüsken observes the reaction, or lack of it, in different religious circles in Tamil Nadu. Fundamental is the question of who is authorised to perform rituals and what impact these political decisions have on traditional ritual hierarchy. The author refers to the role of the classical texts, the Pāñcarātrasaṃhitās, in this fluid social dynamic, in order to explore the ritual of initiation as a priest in present day practice. The issue often subsumed in the social discourse, while pertinent in the religious context, is that of eligibility versus ability, as aptly addressed in the remainder of her paper.

In exploring both the Hindu and Buddhist sources, Gérard Colas establishes that the life-installation of the deity image involves socio-economic factors and public and private domains. He carefully examines historical evolution of *pratiṣṭhā* rites, starting from early Āgamas and the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, to the later Buddhist texts that utilise similar processes for installing images. With reference to the Buddhist veneration of relics and newly-made elements, Colas finds a parallel between the distinction, in the Vaiṣṇava con-

text, between *nyāsa* and *pratiṣṭhā*, the first term referring to establishing shrines for previously revered objects and the second to identifying a new object as a deity image. The main focus of the ritual he explores in depth in his paper is the opening of the eyes, wherein the hitherto covered eyes of the image are opened for public viewing. Colas shifts his attention to empowering an image, essential to establishing shrines for public or private worship. His interpretive approach gives coherence to rather opaque rituals for those not intimately familiar with a culture where images are viewed as alive.

Astrid Zotter explores a rather unique aspect of a Hindu ritual that involves the ritual initiation of an *aśvattha*, popularly known as the Bodhi tree. The ritual, performed since Vedic times and still in practice, brings to light the status of plant life in classical and present-day India. Not only do certain trees receive ritual sacrifices, they can be, as this ritual highlights, initiated, or even adopted by those who lack offspring, and married to another tree. Zotter explores multiple references for advancing her arguments, and brings to light rich material involving the ritual initiation specific to trees. In her analysis, she compares this ritual with others, with a specific focus on the mantras that are used in performing it. Though Zotter comes to the conclusion that the remodelling of a human life-cycle ritual for non-humans is commonplace in classical India, she distinguishes this *aśvattha* initiation from other initiation *saṃskāras*, pointing out the lack of ‘*saṃskāra*’ elements in this case. She ends with Pārvatī’s mythical adoption and fostering of a plant, and her own observation of the marriage of an *aśvattha* with a banyan tree in Orissa.

Overall, reading this volume’s collection of fourteen essays is refreshing. The chapters are rich with a wealth of references, and arguments are sustained with a plethora of examples. The work examines both Hindu and Buddhist rites, and explores textual and

ethnographic materials. Although the chief locus of research is the Kathmandu valley where an integration of Hindu and Buddhist rituals is widely found in the Newar community, the work goes beyond its initial scope of research with essays exploring materials from the Vedic to Vajrayāna, and from the Pāñcarātra sources to Śaiva Siddhānta references. The editors Astrid and Christof Zotter have done a superb job by not only bringing this volume to us, but also by providing an insightful preface that outlines its parameters and provides a frame of reference for readers as they proceed. In addition to the wealth of historical references the scholars explore, their keen observations are relevant to contemporary studies on cultural dynamism, religious conversation, and social identity.

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